

RESEARCH USING INFORMANT-MADE VIDEOS: TWO EXAMPLES

Richard Lachapelle, Professor
Deborah Murray, Master's student
Concordia University

This article reports on the use of informant-made videos as a means of collecting data for use in the study of two very different research topics: *student activism* and aesthetic response. Informant-made videos are video recordings that volunteer study participants create in order to document their own experiences in regard to a well-defined research question; researchers then use these recordings as the primary source of data for their research. Informants produce the recordings under the guidance of the researcher by using a "camcorder", a compact, portable, video camera normally intended for the consumer market.

Ethnographic Filmmaking

As a research approach, informant-made video is grounded in the practice and history of ethnographic filmmaking. Since the late 19th century¹, social scientists, such as anthropologists, have used filmmaking in the course of their study of tribal societies and ethnic groups (Brigard, 1979). Heider (1976) defines ethnographic film as an alliance of "...two ways of seeing and understanding, two strategies for bringing order to (or imposing order on) experience: the scientific and the aesthetic". The best ethnographic films bring together "the art and skills of the filmmaker with the trained intellect and insights of the ethnographer" (1976, p. ix).

Early ethnographic filmmaking has consisted mainly of documentaries produced under the full control and direction of the researcher. In these highly structured situations, the researcher or a research assistant assumes the role of camera operator. Data collected using this method of filmmaking provides documentation of the event in question recorded solely from the point of view of the researcher. Baldwin Spencer's studies of Australian aborigines (1901), and Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead's six ethnographic films about the Balinese (released in 1950) are some examples of this kind of ethnographic filmmaking (Heider, 1976, p.16-42).

More recently, some ethnographers have sought to capture on film the particular point of view of their study subjects. Sol Worth and John Adair (1972) pioneered this approach by investigating the research uses of informant-made ethnographic films. In what is probably the best known example of this new, subject-centered approach, Worth and Adair began studying the culture of Navajo Indians by first training their informants in the art of filmmaking and, then, asking them to produce films about their own cultural practices. Furthering the work of

¹In 1895, Félix-Louis Regnault (assisted by Charles Comte) filmed the pottery fabrication process used by a West-African woman.

these two pioneers, Bellman and Jules-Rosette (1977) have also used informant-made films and videos during the course of their respective studies of the secular and ritual interactions within two separate African communities: the Bapostolo and the Kpelle. In addition to refining a protocol for informant-made filmmaking, Bellman and Jules-Rosette proposed useful ways in which the filmed data could be analyzed. Heider (1976) remarks that the development of informant-made films as an approach to research raises important questions about the culturally specific nature of ethnography since "ethnography has traditionally involved translation, explanation, and analysis of one culture into the idiom of another". According to Heider, "Navajo films would be somehow 'in Navajo' and would therefore be the raw material for ethnography, not ethnography itself" (p. 43).

Ruby (1992) is also interested in the research uses of film and video. He argues that subject-made videos "represent an approach to documentary and ethnographic films dissimilar to dominant practice", that they "challenge our assumptions about the nature of documentary and ethnographic films and potentially offer us insight into the role of culture in the 'language' of film" (p. 43).

In much the same way, participatory film and video posed a similar challenge and went through parallel developments to subject/informant-made videos. For example, the National Film Board's Challenge for Change/Société Nouvelle programs (which began in the late 1960's) took up the question of putting film and, later on, video in the hands of communities. Challenge for Change/Société Nouvelle first began in rural communities like Fogo Island, and then was extended to inner city communities, native populations and women. Challenge for Change grew from an early objective of community collaboration and participation by placing film and video technology in the hands of these communities so that they could constructively use their films as a communication, social, and political tool to evaluate community development concerns, conflict, and struggles. The development of video technology, in particular, made this prospect more realizable. Gwyn comments:

The paraphernalia of movie making — its batteries of lights, lenses, complex sound equipment — used to be as remote from most people's lives as the moon. But the arrival of cheaper and simpler equipment — the arrival, in particular, of portable 1/2" VTR cameras, compact, relatively inexpensive and literally easy enough for an eight year old to work — means that anyone can learn to be an operator in an hour (Gwyn, 1972, p.1).

With the lofty goal of stimulating social change, filmmakers associated with Challenge for Change/Société Nouvelle launched a "new concept in community development" (Gwyn, 1972, p.4-5) which demystified technology and stimulated a feeling of unity and strength (Gwyn, 1972, p.13). The process was easily adapted for informal use. For example:

[...] a community development worker spent an hour a day showing groups of citizens how to work a single Porta-pac, then told them, 'It's yours' til tomorrow morning. If you need help, I'm here.' At a screening in a local church basement, at the end of the week, he found that no less than a third of Schreiber's (an Ontario community) citizens had been in one way or another involved [...] 'this illustrates the theory of small gains. 500 people in Schreiber had learned something about themselves' (Gwyn, 1972, p.13).

As with informant prerogatives. Challenge relationship of filmmaker educational value, and (1992).

In this paper, we of informant-made video self-reflective practice objects.

T

Informant-Made Video

In 1997, Deborah to explore students' movement. The research 1996, in Montreal, d government-initiated tu use informant-made vid It should be noted tha actions in the same p participatory filmmaking analysis of informants' findings.

Each informant producing their own sh With some starts and s sight of a past action. 1 informant set up scenes went along. Both inform which time the videos elaboration.

The verbal and marker method, as def events to be identified the stories being told a and plots, informant p personal feelings and government and admin

In their videos, one case, the location (

day showing groups of them, 'It's yours' til a screening in a local at no less than a third of in one way or another gains. 500 people in (Wyn, 1972, p.13).

In their videos, the informants revisited the events in which they participated and, in one case, the location of a past action. They were able to recall, re-enact, describe and explain

what they were involved in and what was of most concern to them. Physical movements, such as walking with the camera, seemed relevant to highlighting visual elements and, through a process of re-enactment, it also acted as an aid to their storytelling. Both videos revealed aspects about the student movement at that time, the issues involved, the actions that each informant was involved in, and their roles in them.

In this study, the informant-made video method helped the researcher to gain some insights into the reflective period that follows student actions. Visual and verbal events together were important in conveying meaning about the events in question. However, the protocol used in this study did not allow for in-depth, comparative types of analysis such as the examination of changes in student thinking and feeling from the time of the action to the reflective period afterwards. Therefore, it might be useful to explore using IMVs during the course of student actions, as well as afterwards, in order to uncover the deeper procedural thinking, motivation, and interpretations which could be important to understanding the links between action and changes in students' perceptions.

The experience of this study also revealed that the parameters of the video production sessions pose some problems if they are too open-ended. In the future, a more consistent approach to the video production session could ensure that the data collected lends itself to a greater comparative analysis.

Informant-Made Videos and Research on Aesthetic Understanding

In 1993, Richard Lachapelle conducted a research project in order to verify whether an approach using informant-made videos could be effective as a method of studying the aesthetic responses of adult museum visitors (Lachapelle, 1994). First, volunteer informants participated in individual training sessions on the use of the camcorder²; then, they were asked to produce videotapes about two different works of art.

The study demonstrated that the informants were able to use the camcorder in order to effectively record and communicate their interpretation of specific works of art. Using discourse analysis, an analysis of the informants' video-taped commentary³ provided evidence that the informants' videos were as effective as the more traditional audio-taped interviews⁴ as a means of collecting verbal statements about the art objects. All informants reported that it was relatively easy to communicate their thoughts using the camcorder as a recording tool. Furthermore, the study revealed specific characteristics of the IMV approach that make it particularly suitable to certain situations where simple, aural documentation does not fully meet the requirements of a research project.

These unique characteristics of IMV pertain to the visual data contained in the informant-made videos. In this study, the video tape's visual record provided new information

²The study was conducted using an 8mm Sony CCD-TR51 video camcorder.

³The narration of the videos was compared to the content of an audio-taped interview about two additional works of works conducted with each participant prior to the production of the video tapes.

⁴The traditional method for studying visitors' responses to museum exhibitions is to conduct verbal interviews with visitors as they look at various exhibits. These interviews are normally documented using an audiotape recorder.

about adults' art viewing
informants interacted with
characteristics of the wor
participants structured thei

Finally, viewing t
useful by both researcher
works of art and for clarify

Strengths and Weakness

Informant-made v
research data. In contrast
visual documentation of
makes the informant-ma
eliminates the need for fi
the event being studied.

While taping, info
place to which they refer
verbal commentary gre
misinterpreted. Informan
informant's movements v
exhibits.

No other single
informants' discourse as
informant-made videos
trajectories, discourse and

In sum, the inform
a research protocol base
helpful in understanding
visitors. These examples
whenever a research pr
informant.

References

- Bellman, B. & Jules-Ros
with Visual Medi
de Brigard, E. (1979). F
anthropologie vi
Erickson, F. & Wilson, J
and videotape
Research on Te

Physical movements, such as visual elements and, through a storytelling. Both videos revealed the actions that each

ped the researcher to gain some Visual and verbal events together stion. However, the protocol used analysis such as the examination the action to the reflective period MVs during the course of student r procedural thinking, motivation, ing the links between action and

arameters of the video production In the future, a more consistent he data collected lends itself to a

standing

object in order to verify whether an a method of studying the aesthetic , volunteer informants participated th they were asked to produce

e to use the camcorder in order to of specific works of art. Using d commentary' provided evidence itional audio-taped interviews' as a All informants reported that it was camcorder as a recording tool. the IMV approach that make it documentation does not fully meet

the visual data contained in the l record provided new information

ler. d interview about two additional works of tapes. itions is to conduct verbal interviews with cumented using an audiotape recorder.

about adults' art viewing experiences. The tapes clearly demonstrated differences in the way informants interacted with two-dimensional and three-dimensional works. Scale and physical characteristics of the works of art were also found to influence the manner in which study participants structured their art viewing experiences.

Finally, viewing the IMV recordings during follow-up interviews was found to be useful by both researcher and informants as opportunities for exploring new insights into the works of art and for clarifying the statements or images captured on the videotape.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Informant-Made Videos

Informant-made videos provide a number of advantages as a means of recording research data. In contrast to other methods of data collection, informant-made videos provide visual documentation of the object, site, or event to which the informant is referring. This makes the informant-made video recording a coherent and complete body of data that eliminates the need for field notes or other mnemonic devices to trigger researchers' recall of the event being studied.

While taping, informants spontaneously provide close-ups of those parts of the object or place to which they refer in their comments. This use of visual information to complement verbal commentary greatly reduces the chance that informant's statements will be misinterpreted. Informant-made videos automatically provide a visual recording of the informant's movements within a determined space and physical interactions with objects or exhibits.

No other single method of data collection can provide a concomitant record of the informants' discourse as well as other sources of visual information. This singular feature of informant-made videos provides a basis for multiple means of data analysis: tracking of trajectories, discourse analysis, and the study of gestures and physical relationships.

In sum, the information presented above illustrates some of the important advantages of a research protocol based on informant-made videos. These characteristics have proven to be helpful in understanding informants' self-reported experiences as student activists and museum visitors. These examples suggest that informant-made video is suitable as a research method whenever a research problem demands data collected from the point of view of the study informant.

References

- Bellman, B. & Jules-Rosette, B. (1977). *A Paradigm for Looking: Cross-Cultural Research with Visual Media*. Norwood, N.J.: Ablex Publishing Corporation.
- de Brigard, E. (1979). Historique du film ethnographique. In C. de France (Ed.), *Pour une anthropologie visuelle* (pp. 21-51). Paris: Mouton Éditeur.
- Erickson, F. & Wilson, J. (1982). *Sights and sounds of life in schools: a resource guide to film and videotape for research and education*. Michigan State University Institute for Research on Teaching.

- Gwyn, S. (1972). *Cinema As Catalyst: Film Video-tape and Social Change*. St John's: Extension Service, Memorial University of Newfoundland, seminar report.
- Heider, K. G. (1976). *Ethnographic Film*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Henaut, D. T. (1972). Powerful Catalyst. *Challenge for change/Société Nouvelle Newsletter*, No. 7. Montreal: National Film Board of Canada.
- Lachapelle, R. (1994). *Aesthetic understanding as informed experience: ten informant-made videographic accounts about the process of aesthetic learning*. Doctoral Dissertation. Concordia University, Montreal.
- Ruby, J. (1992). Speaking For, Speaking About, Speaking With, or Speaking Alongside: An Anthropological and Documentary Dilemma. *Journal of Film and Video*, 44, 1-2.
- Worth, S. & J. Adair (1972). *Through Navajo Eyes: An Exploration in Film Communication and Anthropology*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Astrid Lagounaris, professeur
Suzanne Lemerise, professeur
Josée Arsenault, étudiante à l'
Université du Québec à Mont

Du métissage des racines p

Je dois avouer d'ér
recherche. Il demandait à êt
continuel mouvement d'all
sujet de cette recherche s'a
culturelles dans un récit de
ensuite le projet à devenir a
vouloir cerner cette problén

Depuis l'enfance j'
la matière. Les artistes et le
passion, j'ai fait des études
enseigner. J'ai terminé un
après, j'accouche d'un gar
n'étais pas parvenue à vivi
des instances culturelles. J
ma place dans le milieu. S
1993, de poursuivre un b
prends la décision de conti

Dans le cadre d'
présenter son travail de r
créer². Cette présentation
difficultés que les mienne
ma propre recherche. J'é
blocage en création artis
Suzanne Lemerise qui m'
de rencontrer Astrid Lago
d'agir comme directrice c

Pour la première
lectures, je lis la thèse c

¹ Ce segment de communicati
² Courval, Solange, *La peur d*

Comité de lecture : Francine Gagnon-Bourget
Pierre Gosselin
Nancy Lambert
Moniques Richard
Lise Robichaud
Andrea Weltzl-Fairchild

Les textes publiés dans ces Actes engagent la responsabilité de leurs seuls auteurs

Composition : Johanne Corbeil

© CRÉA ÉDITIONS
Collectif de recherche en éducation artistique
Département d'arts plastiques
Université du Québec à Montréal
C.P.8888 succ. Centre-Ville
Montréal (Québec) Canada
H3C 3P8

Téléphone : (514) 987-4115
Télécopieur : (514) 987-4047

ISBN 2-9805677-1-X

Dépôt légal : 4^e trimestre 1999
Bibliothèque nationale du Canada
Bibliothèque nationale du Québec

INTRODUCTION

LA MATIÈRE EN AR
Francine Gagnon-Bourget
Sylvie Heine, Université

DÉVELOPPEMENT D
D'ARTS PLASTIQUE
Pierre Gosselin, Université
Marie-Paule Greisch, Université

RESEARCH USING
Richard Lachapelle, Concordia
Deborah Murray, Concordia

TEXTE À TROIS VOIES
Astrid Lagounaris, Université
Suzanne Lemerise, Université
Josée Arsenault, Université

L'ART DE L'ADOLESCENT
UNE EXPÉRIENCE D'ART
Nancy Lambert, Université
Guylaine Trottier, Université

MULTIPLE STREAMS
DISTINGUISHING BE
SHARED FEATURES
David Pariser, Concordia

DÉVELOPPEMENT D
L'EXPLORATION DE
Moniques Richard, Université
Denise Cloutier, Université
Stéphane Dussault, Université